

# American Junior Red Cross NEWS



December 1943



LITTLE REFUGEE

Fritz Eichenberg

# American Junior Red Cross NEWS

## Part I

December • 1943

### When the Mail Came Through

ARMSTRONG SPERRY

Illustrated by the Author

**I**T HAD BEEN snowing hard all Christmas Eve, and now at daybreak a high wind still howled about the chimney of the old Vermont farmhouse. It rattled the shutters and growled at the windows and swept deep white drifts as high as the low-hanging eaves of the woodshed. But inside, all was snug and tight and warm. Six generations of Barkers, thrifty and foresighted, had been born and raised in this house. The woodshed was stacked with split birch and hickory and oak. The pantry shelves were loaded with jars of canned goods and preserves. In the cellar there were pork in brine, barrels of potatoes, and enough carrots and cabbages to last the family till spring. Let winter winds howl!

There was no light anywhere except in the kitchen, where Bexy Barker had lighted the lamp on the shelf above the sink. With the pale gold braids pinned up around her head, Bexy looked older than her thirteen years. She bustled about, with no waste motion. She was a strong girl, with quiet wisdom. For a long time now she had had the responsibility of this kitchen—ever since Ma's arthritis got so bad. It was due to Bexy that the pantry shelves were so well stocked, and the younger children's meals so fortifying against the cold. But it was her fifteen-year-old brother, Cliff, who saw to the outside chores and kept the

woodshed filled to the eaves, for their father was dead. Between them, they were a fine team.

Cliff was pulling on his boots beside the stove. His hands looked too big for his thin arms. Still half asleep, he straightened and yawned. The yawn merged into a sigh. "Gee, I wish it was spring. Listen to that wind!"

"Ho!" scoffed Bexy. "You scared of a little cold weather?"

"Tain't that." The boy's words were slow in coming. Cliff wasn't one for easy talk. But now there seemed to be words pressing to be spoken, and he struggled with them. "D'you remember what Joe wrote in that last letter from Guadalcanal—about the south pasture?"

"Yes. He said he wanted you to break it up this spring and sow it to wheat."

"That's right," the boy replied, his eyes reflective. "Joe said it'd take a lot of bread to win this war. That's why I wish it was spring!" he finished eagerly. "So's I could get started on that pasture." Then, suddenly, the brightness seemed to go out of Cliff's face. "And now Joe won't never know I've done it."

"Don't say that!" Bexy reprimanded sharply. "He'll know you're doing his work just the same as if he was here. And he'll be so proud he'll burst his buttons. We've all got

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to do our part, every last one of us. Joe'll know."

"You believe that?"

"I know it." There was absolute faith and finality in the girl's words and, hearing them, Cliff took heart. "Guess I'd better get out and see to the cows," he said. "Some folks claim cattle are always restless on Christmas Eve. . . ."

An icy gust swept into the kitchen as Cliff opened the woodshed door, causing the lamp to flare and dim. Hastily the boy banged the door after him. Bexy stood listening to the sound of his retreating footsteps, and she felt a rush of pride in this brother of hers who had done a man's full work ever since Joe went away to war: plowing, harrowing, planting, harvesting, driving the surplus to market. Cliff was head of his domain just as Bexy was of hers. Together they had held the family firm and seen to its needs; and, in so doing, each was adding his or her mite to the great need of America in this time of stress. Not just the need for grain and eggs and milk and meat, but the need for vigor and courage and faith. But, then, six generations of Barkers had been raised on these virtues, so it was small wonder that Bexy never gave such matters a thought. You just did whatever needed to be done, as well as you were able. The strength came from somewhere. That's all there was to it!

And standing there listening to Cliff's retreating footsteps, Bexy found her gaze being drawn toward the photograph that hung in a place of honor on the wall by the table—the last picture taken of Joe in his uniform of captain in the Marine Corps. Last Christmas Joe had been home on furlough, laughing with them, teasing the young ones, helping to decorate the tree, eating mountains of doughnuts and pancakes, and telling wondrous tales of Guadalcanal and the black men who lived in the jungles. And tales, too, of fights with enemy Zero-planes high against the sun. But

this Christmas. . . . A knot tightened in Bexy's throat and she brushed a hand across her eyes.

Determinedly the girl set about her tasks.

Nothing should spoil this day if she could help it! She stuffed presents into the row of stockings that hung on nails above the wood box. Those stockings belonged to her four younger brothers and sisters, still sound asleep upstairs in the cold north bedroom. They'd be down any minute now—squabbling with one another over the gifts. There was a

Scout knife for George, who was ten. A green lucite comb and brush for Julie, who was eight. A doll for Lola May, aged six. And a fuzzy bear for Jerry, the baby, who was four and mighty spoiled.

Bexy's hands were quick and capable. In no time the four stockings, stuffed with gifts and striped candy and nuts and oranges, looked like so many boa constrictors that had choked on a rabbit.

"Joe would want this Christmas to be happy for everyone," the girl said half aloud. "It's got to be. And we won't let Ma have a chance to be alone with her thoughts. . . ."

The stockings filled, there remained the other presents to be wrapped. Bexy did them all up in white tissue and tied them with red ribbon that had been salvaged from other Christmases and sponged and pressed until almost as good as new. Then she placed the packages on the floor under the full-branched balsam tree that stood in one corner. The children had helped to trim the tree the night before, with festoons of strung cranberries and popcorn balls, and here and there a glitter of well-worn tinsel. A Star of Bethlehem that had crowned every Barker tree since Joe himself was a baby, glistened on the topmost branch. Like the rest of the room the Christmas tree seemed to hold its breath with waiting.

"There, it's lovely," Bexy sighed, backing off



Six generations of Barkers had been reared in this house



to survey the finished result. "Don't know as I ever saw a more handsome tree."

There was one thing Bexy had saved to do for the last and most important. Her breath came a little quicker as she broke off a branch of green, tied it with a bit of red ribbon and laid it across the top of Joe's photograph. Then she kissed a finger and pressed the kiss lightly against her soldier brother's cheek.

"That's for you, Joe. My gift to you."

And for a second it seemed that Joe smiled back at her, his quick, warm smile. And standing there in the cozy kitchen with the wintry wind worrying at the shutters and causing the old house to tremble, there came over Bexy the remembrance of that terrible morning, six months ago now, when the letter had come from the War Department. . . . There hadn't been many words in that letter. It hadn't needed many . . . "missing in action. . . ."

For the thousandth time, "It can't be true," the girl thought desperately. "Not Joe. It can't be—"

Upstairs the first of the young ones was already stirring. Then George was piping: "Hi, fellers, it's Christmas! Come on, let's get downstairs!"

Then Bexy heard her mother's dry, restless cough in the front bedroom, and the girl's heart contracted. How brave her mother had been! Trying not to let the young ones know, trying to do her part. As if Bexy and Cliff couldn't guess what it cost her!

Cliff was returning from the barn now, clumping through the woodshed, and Bexy welcomed his return. She glanced up as he entered, his face scarlet with cold. He beat the snow off his coat and sought the warmth of the stove, rubbing his hands together at a great rate. .

"Everything all

right in spite of the snow?" Bexy inquired.

"Right as rain. But the cows did seem kind of uneasy—as if something important was going to happen. Maybe there's truth in that old tale, after all." Cliff paused, as if there were something on his mind he didn't know how to bring out. Bexy guessed what was worrying him but she waited for him to speak. Suddenly he was saying: "This is going to be a mighty hard day for Ma."

"Yes. . . . But we'll help her over it, Cliff, somehow."

The boy nodded. "Yup. We can do it, Bexy. Here come the kids now. They'll help, too, or I'll take it out of their hides!"

There was a thud of bare feet on the stair, and a whirl like a minor tornado as the four youngest Barkers swept into the kitchen. Their voices shrilled in chorus as they reached for the stockings hanging behind the stove.

"Gee, look what I got!"

"A Scout knife. Oh boy!"

"Here, that's mine! Leggo!"



Everyone in the old Barker kitchen talked at once until you could scarcely have heard yourself think. A letter signed by the President!

"It is not, is it, Bexy? Ain't that my stocking?"

"There, now!" Bexy moved swiftly into the threatened breach. "You young ones behave yourselves or I'll get the hairbrush out so it'll be handy. Lola May, you'll have an arm off that doll before night if you don't watch out. And, George, if you leave that Scout knife around so Jerry can cut himself, there'll be consequences for you, young man. Here, let me help you with that knot, Jerry—baby—You kids can get dressed after breakfast—"

"I woke up in the middle of the night," George announced. "I bet nobody else didn't wake up in the middle of the night."

"I almost did," declared Lola May, who had already undressed her doll and was combing out the flaxen hair.

"And I suppose you heard Santa Claus," Cliff joked at his younger brother.

"Nope!" came George's scoffing answer. "But I did hear somethin'. I heard the snow-plow goin' through. Now Mr. Thatch can get through with the mail."

"Mail?" came Lola May's thin treble. "Whoever would be writin' to us?"

"Huh!" George came back at her. "I guess we're mighty important. Didn't the War Department write to us once?"

"Be quiet!" Bexy cried out sharply, her heart sinking. For already she had heard her mother's slow step on the stair. Abashed at his sister's fierce rebuke, George fell to silent contemplation of the Scout knife. Suddenly silent, all the children glanced toward the door as their mother entered.

Mrs. Barker was a frail woman. Her shoulders were bent with hard farm work, her hands misshapen with arthritis. But she smiled at them all, a bright crooked smile that embraced each one, and held out her hands.

"Merry Christmas, my children!" she called.

And they ran to her, and she gathered them into her arms. Something in Bexy's heart caught and she felt a stinging on her eyelids. Ma was like that. You could always count on her.

"Merry Christmas, Ma!" Bexy called from her place at the stove. "I thought this'd be a good day for sausage and waffles. We never had better pork sausage than this year—"

Now the packages under the tree were being unwrapped: the gifts which meant so much to a family living on a remote farm in Vermont. Most of the gifts the Barkers had made surreptitiously for one another throughout the year, and the children had made things in

school. Bexy had crocheted a set of tidies for her mother who, in turn, produced some aprons for her oldest daughter, laboriously feather-stitched with her misshapen fingers. There were heavy knitted socks for the boys, a necktie for Cliff. Everyone talked at once until you could scarcely have heard yourself think in the old Barker kitchen. Bexy was stirring the waffle batter furiously while the double iron heated and the tempting odor of frying sausage filled the room.

Suddenly, cutting across the sound of their voices, there came the shrill pipe of a whistle down the road. Startled, instantly silent, they stared at one another, not speaking.

"What's that?" faltered Bexy finally. But she knew—

Cliff sprang to his feet, flung on his jacket. "That's Mr. Thatch!" he stammered in his excitement. "It's mail—Christmas mail for us!" He was out the door before anyone could speak a word. Bexy saw that her mother's face paled and drew in lines of grief. She would never hear the postman's whistle without remembering that morning, six months ago. . . . And the girl found herself listening with every nerve for Cliff's returning step on the porch. Suddenly the kitchen door was flung open again. Cliff was there, his face as white as the envelope he held in his hand. Slowly Mrs. Barker came to her feet. But Bexy was ahead of her mother.

"Who's it for?" she demanded.

Cliff gulped. "It's—it's addressed to Ma."

"I'll read it," Bexy announced matter-of-factly. "You haven't your glasses, Ma—"

"Where's it from?" The woman's words were low and tense.

Now it was Bexy's turn to gulp. She stared at the inscription in the upper left-hand corner of the envelope. "Land," she gasped, "it's from the White House, in Washington!" Her fingers were shaking as she tore open the envelope.

"Read it! Read it!" the children were all shouting at once.

Bexy's eye raced across the single page. Slowly then she brought out the words. "It says:—

"My dear Mrs. Barker: This letter should reach you on Christmas Day, and with it come my happiest felicitations. I know that it will make you a proud and joyful mother. Your son Joseph Barker, reported missing in action six months ago, effected an escape from the enemy in November. At present he is re-

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## *"Hold Her Hand, Nobby..."*

*Jean Dain*

"... and look after her" were the parting instructions of a mother to her four-year-old son. Nobby and Maisie, aged three, were going away, but not to the seaside this time. Picnicking on the salty dunes would have to be postponed, for Britain's beaches were barricaded with barbed wire and promenades had become fortified defense lines. Nobby took his sister by the hand and watched over her constantly until three weeks after they had arrived at Beech Hill—a nursery home for war-shocked children and children whose homes had been bombed.

Nobby and Maisie are typical of thousands of children made homeless when England's cities were blitzed. Parents became too busy to care for their loved ones properly. Mothers stepped into overalls to replace men in factories, and fathers stepped into "Spitfires" and "Hurricanes." Besides, it was important that the children should be cared for in safe places. And so, as the battle of Britain raged, you American Junior Red Cross members put nickels and dimes into your National Children's Fund to help support war nurseries and convalescent homes for British children.

In a corner of England, untouched by Nazi bombs, stands an old country manor house. High on a hill overlooking the River Loddon, Beech Hill opens its doors to boys and girls under five who need more care than regular nurseries can give. The big red brick house was built more than two hundred years ago. In 1740 it was purchased by an ancestor of Miss Mary Hunter who is the present owner and commandant of the nursery. By the front door of the mansion a century-old magnolia tree, with generations of folklore buried in its roots, climbs upward to the roof. On the south side of the house a rambling porch leads from the drawing room to the old garden, now a Victory Garden, of course. On the east side another porch forms the main entrance from the drive. To every child who has entered its gates, Beech Hill is a wonderland of old oaks, soft grass, magnolias and laughter.

During the first few days at Beech Hill, Nobby and Maisie were bewildered and shy. But Nobby didn't forget what his mother had told him. He never let his sister out of his sight. One time when Maisie cried out in the night, Nobby hopped out of his little cot in the boy's dormitory and ran to her, calling, "It's all right. Nobby's coming." Often, children who have been bombed out have a hard time recovering from the shock of what they have been through and have bad dreams for a long time afterwards. It wasn't long, though, before Nobby and Maisie were making gingerbread men in the sandbox with their new playmates. One of these is Jill, who is the same age as Maisie. Her father, a Polish parachutist, was killed in the war. One day when Nurse Smith spoke Polish to her, Jill's eyes brightened. Although she did not respond, she understood the language perfectly.

Nurse Smith herself came to the nursery after she had recovered from a ten-year illness, and today she is the most energetic member of the staff. She delights in telling visitors that the children at Beech Hill change almost overnight from delicate, and often sick little things, to rosy-cheeked, husky boys and girls.

The most enterprising of all the children is Margaret, aged three. Often the nurses put her into cap and pinafore and allow her to help around the house; then she insists on being called "Nurse Margaret" by everyone at Beech Hill.

One bright July afternoon twenty-three little tots, from the stages of crawling to walking, had a tea party. All dressed up in party pinks and blues, they stuffed themselves with cake and milk. Six pretty young English girls in blue linen uniforms stood behind them and helped Maisie with her big spoon, and stopped Nobby from throwing bread balls across the table at Derrick.

Life in the nursery has its moments. One day Johnny, a newcomer to Beech Hill, was MISSING! Nurses, cooks and the children themselves searched the house. At last they found him upstairs in his sister's room pouring tea in fancy swirls all over Miss Hunter's good carpet.

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# Footlights for Christmas

BABETTE DEUTSCH

Illustrations by Donald McKay

"IT'S A SWELL idea!" insisted Thursty, otherwise called Dwight Thurston, Jr., of the Second Form.

"Aren't those kids too young to be any use?" asked Jim. His voice, perhaps because it had already changed, counted heavily.

"Plenty of fellas there our age," said Thursty. "Look at Ernst."

They looked at Ernst. He had introduced them to The Welcome. This was a house run by his mother's old friend, Susi, for refugee girls and boys like Ernst, who had no proper home. Thursty had spent the night there once and found it a wacky place, but jolly. Like Susi who ran it. After that night he'd begun to feel differently about Ernst. He hadn't liked him a little bit when he came to school at the beginning of the term. His speech was funny. So was his haircut. He hadn't known a homerun from a touchdown. He still said "Sursty" for "Thursty" and "Fazzer" for "Father" (his own father had died in a concentration camp). But he was a pretty good quarterback and a good guy.

"I sink—think," Ernst corrected himself, frowning when the question was put to him, "that they could help us a lot."

"They ought to be able to tell us what to put in the scenes we're stuck with," said Pete. "Those kids come from everywhere."

The school festival this year was called "Christmas Everywhere," but what did they know about the way it was celebrated in Poland and Spain and Czechoslovakia? What, glumly demanded Pete, who was to appear as a French peasant, did they know about "beau Noël"?

"Looks to me," said Booker T. W. Jones, sometimes known

as Alphabet Soup, "like we're bound to get some notions from those foreign kids. Even if we don't learn anything but some fancy names to use, it ought to help some. My Uncle Bill, the one that was with the circus, he said everybody in the show had a foreign name. There was a fellow from Kansas called himself Don Alfonso, and the bareback rider, she came from Brooklyn, I think, she was Mademoiselle Somethingorother."

That was Friday. On Saturday a committee of inquiry composed of Thursty and Pete, Jim and Booker and Ernst, met at The Welcome.

Jim was annoyed to find, as he had feared, a lot of small children as useless as Thursty's little sister, only worse because some of them couldn't speak English. And there were also girls. The boy with the fancy name of Ladislaus, on whom they had counted for a description of Christmas in a Polish village, was home with a cold. But there was another boy from the neighborhood of Warsaw who, though he had only the commonplace name of John, could give them all the information they wanted.

"It's got to be good!" cried Susi. She had been starved for festivals ever since she had fled from Vienna when the Nazis came into power in Austria. "Do you know what Mr. Andrews told me?" she went on, her warmly colored face dimpling happily. "He said our boys and girls who work with you, they will be invited to your dress rehearsal. Na, we must make it good!"

The queerest part of the day for Thursty was the half hour he spent with a boy named David, who had come to The Welcome from Palestine. David had never celebrated



Thursty peered anxiously through the parted curtain. He was shaking with excitement



Christmas in his life. Thursty was so amazed at this that he hardly heard what David had to say about the Jewish feast of Hanukkah which fell just at Christmastime. He did gather, though, that it had a Christmasy flavor. If there wasn't a tree with a Star on it, there were eight Hanukkah candles that had to do with the Jewish legend of miraculous lights. And it meant lots of good things to eat and an exchange of presents, too.

"I never thought of it before," said David in a surprised voice, "but I suppose Jesus must have celebrated Hanukkah when he was our age; he was brought up as a good Jew. Maybe it was like a birthday party for him."

It almost made Thursty feel like trying to introduce a Hanukkah scene into the festival. Perhaps the play would be a success, after all. Anyway, it would be different from anything the school had ever seen.

But by the time they were on the eve of the dress rehearsal, Thursty was convinced that the festival would be a flop.

Susi's kids had been more interested in learning about a real American Christmas than in talking of the celebrations they had known in Europe. And just when you thought you were going to find out something exciting, they'd say, "But the rest I forget."

Aside from the scenery he had painted, the only good thing, as far as Thursty could see, was the costumes. There was never anything quite like Pete got up as a French peasant, or Richard as a Polish lord. Susi's kids had helped a lot there, not only with suggestions, but with surprising scraps from their trunks. But nobody seemed to know his lines. And Mr. Andrews, the teacher who was running the play, was so cross that Thursty began to feel, as Moth' would say, that maybe he was "coming down with something." There were moments when Thursty hoped he was, because then they'd all be put in quarantine, and wouldn't have to give the play at all.

After a particularly bad performance, they were practicing the songs, most of which were foreign ones and quite new to them. They were to wind up with a favorite of Thursty's, a Ukrainian folk song, the English words of which were short and sweet:

Yuletide wakes, Yuletide breaks;  
Woman, give me eggs and cakes.  
If the cakes you do not give,  
Your old ox will never live;  
I will take him to the wood,  
And will twist his horns for good.  
If you make me stand and wait,

I will take away  
your gate.

If you will not give  
me eggs,

I will break your  
chickens' legs.

Yuletide wakes,  
Yuletide breaks;

Woman, give me  
eggs and cakes.\*

Thursty decided to get some fun out of this at least. He cast his eyes about, so that the boys would know they were to follow his lead. Then he began, in as low a voice as he could manage:

"Yuletide wakes, Yuletide breaks," continuing in a beggar's slow whine: "Woman, give me eggs and cakes!"

"What sort of song do you think this is?"

Mr. Andrews said sharply, "'Hallelujah, I'm a bum!'" Start over again. And put some spirit into it!"

Thursty chuckled. This time he began singing very softly, and got noisier as he went on, until he threatened the chickens' legs with a shout. The others took their cue from him. The last lines sounded like a riot transmitted by loud-speaker.

"Is that what you call spirit?" demanded Mr. Andrews.

"Well, there's not much Christmas spirit in the song," said Thursty, sputtering with laughter.

Angry as he was, Mr. Andrews grinned briefly.

"Don't worry about that," he said. "Jim

\* "Yuletide," tr. by J. Robbins from the Botsford Collection of Folk Songs, V-2, G. Schirmer and Co.



Mr. Andrews said sharply, "'Hallelujah, I'm a bum!'" Start over again. And put some spirit into it!"

Clark will take care of that end of it." Jim was to come in at the close of the performance as Father Christmas. "But see here," he said savagely, "do you fellows realize how soon the festival comes off? Maybe you don't give a hoot about making a good showing before the school." (Oh, but they did, and he knew it.) "Still, you don't want to let certain other people down." (Did he mean Susi's kids?) "They don't come up for the games. Your report cards aren't much more than scraps of paper to them." (No, not Susi's kids.) "The festival is the one chance your fathers have to see what you can do when you've put all you've got into it. By the way," he added in a tone of deep irony, "I don't suppose you ever get anything from your parents. Hands up, those of you who are so rash as to expect something from them when Christmas comes round." He smiled at the class sardonically. And then, as Mr. Andrews looked at the raised hands, his face twisted in an expression of almost physical pain, and he looked away.

"All right!" he said harshly, as he faced them again. "We'll go over this tomorrow at nine sharp. You're dismissed."

"The bell hasn't even rung yet," Thursty said to Ernst in a puzzled whisper.

With a kind of backward vision Thursty recalled that when every other boy had his hand up, some of them both hands, Ernst hadn't raised his at all. He didn't expect anything from a father who was dead and a mother three thousand miles away. And Mr. Andrews knew it. And hated himself for having men-

tioned fathers and mothers. That was why he had shouted at them and let them go.

And then, without warning it seemed, the evening of the dress rehearsal was upon them. And the kids from The Welcome were there to see it. And so were their own fathers and mothers. (The school saw the performance the following afternoon.) It was like a first night. Horribly exciting. And, Thursty thought, peering anxiously through a hole in the curtain, sure to go wrong. The worst of it was that at the last moment, Jim Clark had sprained his ankle, and the part of Father Christmas had fallen to Thursty. He had had no time to learn it properly.

He backed into the wings and stood there, perspiring with dread and grease paint. It seemed to him that he knew by heart everybody's speech but his own. I bet, he thought, it'll all be swell and then the last scene will come and I'll go out there and not know my lines and spoil the whole thing.

Suddenly Mr. Andrews was megaphoning a whispered: "Lights out." The chorus began the opening measures of the song to which the curtains parted: "We Three Kings of Orient Are." The lights in the gym went out, the footlights went on, and Booker, in the grand robes of one of the Three Kings, stepped onto the stage.

It did go well. Only once Richard forgot his part, and Mr. Andrews prompted him so quickly and softly that nobody guessed. The Give-me-eggs-and-cakes song made everybody laugh. And when the glee club sang "Silent Night," some of the kids from The Welcome joined in, and soon nearly everyone was singing.

But Thursty, waiting his turn to speak, felt as though a lot of little clocks were ticking away inside of him. His face was hot behind the wooly white beard, and his hands were cold. And then, with the whole cast assembled on the stage, the footlights blazing, the spot waiting to find him, he had to go on.

He scarcely saw the crowd behind and around him in their variegated costumes. It was dim out in front so he couldn't distinguish even the faces he knew. The distressing clockwork business inside him was no longer running. But there was a queer sensation in his throat and a blurry view before him. And his brain seemed to have stopped. He couldn't remember a syllable of Jim's speech. He could hear Mr. Andrews trying to prompt him, but he couldn't make out what the stage whisper meant.



There was never anything quite like Pete got up as a French peasant, or Booker as one of the Three Kings

He had to do something. He began speaking. They weren't the words he was supposed to say, and as he began with "Merry Christmas, everybody!" there was a slight titter from the wings. But he didn't care. He just couldn't stand there like a dumb ox, with Pop and Moth' and his small sister Cecilia and Susi and the kids from The Welcome out there, expecting something from him. The heck with Jim's speech! He'd have to "ad lib," as Mr. Andrews put it. He wetted his dry lips and began again.

"Merry Christmas, everybody," he repeated, "and, thank you for being such a good audience." This time there was a little laugh from down in front. Thursty swallowed and went on, hastily.

"And thank you for helping us; some of you, you know who I mean, helped us a lot, showed us Christmas could be celebrated different ways in different places."

Suddenly he remembered, not Jim's speech, but something Mr. Andrews had said to him once, talking about Ernst. "It's a funny thing," he'd said, "you know the word the old Greeks had for a foreigner was 'barbaros'; that's what we get our word 'barbarian' from. But really, it's we who behave like barbarians when a stranger comes along. When you see fellows insisting that everybody must be their own kind, or else—why, it's as though there were a Redheaded League or a Society of Hunchbacks who refused to play along unless everybody on earth dyed their hair red or wore a hump. It doesn't matter if you have red hair or black, if you're humped or straight: you've got to be yourself and let the other fellow be himself. That's why Ernie's father had to die: because there are people who want everything their own way and everyone to toe the line they've drawn. It's a rotten shame, and it means tough going for the rest of us for I don't know how long. And if we think we're not partly to blame, it'll be worse all around. But we'll make it. We've got to!"

Thursty, standing on the stage, in his stuffy Father Christmas costume, with all those kids from The Welcome staring at him, knew all at



"I am Father Christmas. In my pack I carry what each of you wishes most"

once exactly what Mr. Andrews had meant.

"There's lots of ways of celebrating Christmas," he went on, almost as though he were thinking out loud. "The important thing isn't whether you put the presents in a stocking or a wooden shoe; it's the presents themselves that matter: giving somebody something. Like it doesn't matter if you sing 'Come All Ye Faithful' or 'Adeste Fideles'; the words are different, but they mean the same thing."

Thursty wanted to say something about Hanukkah and Christmas, but he didn't know how. But as he went on, he felt a curious release, as though his words didn't matter now because he had the attention of everybody, and through the awkward phrases something that he felt at the moment dimly but unmistakably shone. Just then Jim's speech came back to him.

"I am Father Christmas," he began, "and here in my pack I carry what each of you wishes for most."

Yet even as he spoke he forgot what followed. Not knowing what to say next, he repeated slowly: "What each of you wishes for most," and paused, and said, in a rounder voice than he had ever used: "Peace on earth, good will to men."

The curtains fell together. Out there in front they burst into thunderous applause. As the curtains parted again, with the lights



on, Thursty could see them clapping and smiling and hear Cecilia's voice crying out: "That's my brother! Father Christmas is my brother!" The boys crowded round him, grinning and clapping his shoulder.

"That wasn't your speech, fella."

"You got what I want most, Father Christmas?"

"Some pinchhitting! You're O. K. Thursty!"

"O. K." repeated Mr. Andrews, smiling at Susi over the boys' heads. "Thursty knows what we want most. It's up to all of us to try and get it."

This story is one incident from "The Welcome," a grand book by Miss Deutsch about these same characters and their adventures. Harper, New York.

## When the Mail Came Through

(Continued from page 78)

cuperating in Australia from malaria, but it is expected that by June he will be able to come to Washington where, my dear Mrs. Barker, I hope you will find it possible to be present when I bestow upon him in person the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroism and valor almost unsurpassed in this war. I remain, my dear Mrs. Barker—"

Bexy's voice faltered and died.

"What is it?" Cliff almost shouted. "Finish what it says—"

"It's signed," Bexy quavered, "by the President of the United States! There, now, Ma, what are you crying for? Joe's most as good as home, and he's a hero!"

"You're cryin' yourself," scoffed George, knuckling a tear out of his own eye. "Only sissies cry."

Then everyone was laughing and crying at once, and the letter was almost torn to pieces by eager fingers.

"Land sakes, the coffee's boiling over!" Bexy cried, making a dash for the stove.

"And the waffles are burning," Cliff grinned. "A body'd think we never had a letter before."

"The cat's got into the cream pitcher," crowed Lola May with delight.

"Come now, come all of you," Bexy cried, flushed with excitement and the warmth of the stove. "Everything's ready, and there are two waffles to start on—"

They all took their places, then looked toward their mother who sat at the head of

the table. Mrs. Barker's face was white but her lips were smiling, and in her eyes was a light they had never seen before. Slowly then she clasped her hands on the table edge and bowed her head. The children folded their own hands and cast down their eyes. Into the silence their mother's words, low at first, came with gathering strength:

"We thank Thee, Lord, for this day's great blessing. We thank Thee for the fruits of the earth, and for the strength Thou hast granted us to harvest them. From our hearts we thank Thee—" her voice faltered for a second, then resumed, "we thank Thee for Thy Son born this day, who gave His life, that all men might be free. Amen. . . ."

They raised their heads and smiled happily into one another's eyes.

"It's only six months till June," Cliff mused. "Joe'll know now I've sowed the south pasture—"

"I told you he'd know," said Bexy quietly. "George, take your thumb out of the syrup pitcher! Lola May, don't try to put a whole waffle into your mouth at once. Joe won't think much of your manners when he gets home. Remember, he'll be having supper at the White House, like as not!"

When Joe gets home. . . . There's magic in the words, she thought happily. And, unseen by the others, Bexy blew a little kiss toward the photograph.

Perhaps no one else knew it, but Bexy knew: Joe smiled back at her!



### NO JANUARY NEWS THIS YEAR

We'll have to wish all Junior Red Cross members a Happy New Year now, because the paper shortage makes it necessary for us to have only eight issues this year, and we are therefore omitting the January issue in order to allot four issues to each half term. So don't write in if you don't get a January NEWS, but do expect your usual number of copies in February.





VISUAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF SANTA BARBARA CITY SCHOOLS

**Santa Barbara J. R. C. members are making decorative posters and favors for our soldiers**

## Christmas Gifts



COURTESY OF TRIBUNE AND STAR JOURNAL

The boys and girls of J. R. C. have been scurrying around and salvaging all kinds of material to be made into attractive gifts for our armed forces. Above, Tirzah, South Carolina, members are making wreaths to hang in the dayrooms at Fort Jackson. Right, J. R. C. members of Dallas, Texas, are engaged in making Christmas decorations for children's hospitals. Left, the boys in Minneapolis are doing their bit by repairing toys for the child care center day nurseries. The children of America are learning to share their Christmas with others. They have had a request from the A. R. C. Commissioner in Great Britain to make and send gifts to the men overseas. (See page 90)



## "Hold Her Hand, Nobby . . ."

*(Continued from page 79)*

One morning Nurse Smith put a box of chocolates in the second day nursery planning to take it into the children's dining room later on. She was sure she had put it out of sight and out of reach of snoopers. But when she went back to get it, a small company of brown, smeary faces looked up at her. She asked if anyone had seen the chocolates. There was silence, until one voice piped up, "It's nice"; and that was all the information to be had.

Often the children go for a visit in Miss Hunter's drawing room. On the walls hang portraits of three little girls, original owners of Beech Hill, who played in the garden when Charles the First was King. How different they look in their tight-laced dresses from the children in sun suits who live there today.

The scent of the heliotrope growing in the conservatory steals into Miss Hunter's retreat. There she spends most of her time thinking what more can be done for the children.

What happens to a child in his first five years makes a great difference in all his after life. So the shelter and care and affection that Nobby and Maisie and the rest are getting at Beech Hill are very important indeed. When members of the American Junior Red Cross contribute money from their National Children's Fund to keep Beech Hill going for a whole year and to help support other nurseries and convalescent homes for war-shocked children, they are helping to drive away the dark shadows of war, and to make many lives happier in the present and more useful in the future. It is a big service, worth doing.

# American Junior Red Cross NEWS

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DECEMBER, 1943

NO. 4

## National Officers of the American Red Cross

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MARY LOUISE FAGG.....	Assistant Editor

The American Junior Red Cross is the American Red Cross in the schools.

## The Junior Red Cross Honored



ON OCTOBER 26th the American Junior Red Cross was honored when the *Parents' Magazine* Medal for Outstanding Service to Children was awarded its leader, Mr. James T. Nicholson. In

making the award, Mr. George J. Hecht, publisher of *Parents' Magazine*, spoke of Mr. Nicholson's important positions with the Red Cross, especially his international assignments. "He brings real understanding of the importance of world fellowship to his leadership of America's young people," he said.

In accepting the award, Mr. Nicholson said:

"It is a pleasure to me to accept this award in behalf of the American Junior Red Cross. I realize that actually it is the membership that has achieved the results you feel to be worthy of recognition. My colleagues and I, who have had the privilege of working with these boys and girls, are amply rewarded by the satisfaction we derive from these associations. They, not we, produced the accomplishments."

The *Parents' Magazine* Medal has been awarded annually for twelve years. Among other distinguished people to whom it has been given are Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Walt Disney, Katharine Lenroot, Dr. Walter Damrosch, and Dr. Thomas Parran.

For twenty-six years the American Junior Red Cross has served children in our country and abroad through the National Children's Fund, made up of voluntary contributions from one generation of school children after

another. Today children in Russia, in England, in Greece and in East Africa are more comfortable because of purchases made for them from the Fund. And children in more than a dozen countries are receiving the Junior Red Cross gift boxes sent from schools all over our land with shipping costs paid from the N. C. F.

That Fund is something for every member of the American Junior Red Cross to be proud of. Members in this great country, unscarred by battle, will have ever greater opportunities to help children who have suffered from unimaginable terror and misery. You can meet these responsibilities by making generous contributions to the National Children's Fund.

## Posadas and Buñuelos

WHEN WE ASKED Leo Politi to do your cover, he wrote, "Yes, I would love to do the Christmas cover as a little present to the readers of the News." Later he wrote, "The children holding the red lanterns on the side of the street are lighting and guiding the way for the 'Posadas'. On Olvera Street here in Los Angeles they have the Posadas every year just as they do in Mexico."

Bess Adams Garner says in "Mexico: Notes in the Margin":

"Las Posadas (pronounce it po-sah'dahs) are the songs of those seeking *posada*, or shelter, and used to be sung all over Mexico nine days before Christmas. It was decided long before Christmas which families were to entertain for *Las Posadas*, and then each night, for nine nights, people gathered at first one house and then another. A part of the group went outside of the house, either carrying images of the Saints—Mary, Joseph and the Angel—or else representing the Saints, and sang, asking shelter from the dark, stormy night. The group inside refused until Christmas Eve, when they opened their doors and sang:

"Enter, Mary, Queen of Heaven,

Enter, Mother of the Creator,

Enter, Holy Joseph, into this poor house'.

"Then the Saints came in and there was a very gay and lively fiesta."

On the page opposite are the words and music of two of the favorite Posadas. The third song is popular among Mexican children at Christmas; the recipe for the *buñuelos* (cakes) is as follows:

2 cups of flour  
1 Tbsp. sugar  
2 eggs, not separated  
4 Tbsp. baking powder  
Milk to make a thin batter

Drop the batter by tablespoons into hot deep fat. The cakes may be served with powdered sugar sprinkled over them. (From "Your Mexican Kitchen" by Natalie V. Scott.) Miss Dorothy Conzelman of the Pan American Union tried out the recipe for us.

# Three Mexican Carols

THE FIRST TWO CAROLS ARE POSADAS, AS REMEMBERED AND SUNG BY MIGUEL VERA, FROM "MEXICO—NOTES IN THE MARGIN," BY BESS A. GARNER, PADUA HILLS THEATER, CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA. MUSIC FOR "NOCHE BUENA" CAROL ARRANGED BY CHARLES SEEGER. ALL THREE CAROLS TRANSLATED BY DOROTHY CONZELMAN.

1

Ha-mil-des pe-re-gri-nos, Je-sus, Ma-ri-a, y Jo-sé. Mi  
O hum-ble pil-grims keep us! Jo-seph and Mary and Je-sus. My

al-ma doy—con e—llos. Mi co-ra-zon—tam-bien—  
soul at last—has found them, My heart has found them now.

2

O pe-re-gri-na gra-cia—da, O, be-lli-si-ma Ma-ri  
O pil-grim, full of Hea-u-en's grace, Mary, O most beau-ti-ful

a yo te of-res-co-el al-ma mi—a Pa-ra que len-gais po-sa-da.  
one, I of-fer you my soul, my soul, to be an inn to shel-ter you.

3

Es-ta si-gue-es no-che bue-na, no-che bue-na, no-che de co-mer bu-ñe-los  
En mi ca-sa no los ha-cen, no los ha-cen, por fal-ta de ha-vi-na y hue-vo

Ye-es, this is Christ-mas ni-ght, Christ-mas ni-ght, the—time to eat fried ca-akes,  
But at our house no one makes them, no one bakes them, for lack of flour and e-eggs.

# Christmas in Reindeer Land

DOROTHY R. INMAN

Decoration by Jane Curry

IT WAS the middle of October when we reached Golovin Bay where we had to leave the steamer that had brought us from Seattle to Alaska. And even before we left the S. S. *Mt. McKinley*, we got an introduction to reindeer land. For as we stood on the deck that afternoon we saw a whole barge-load of reindeer, twenty-seven in all, being loaded aboard for the return trip. The night before, we had been kept awake by the noise of the hammers and workmen making stalls for the reindeer on the ship. Somebody told us that an Eskimo herder was going along and that the deer were being sent to New York for a Christmas exhibit in a big department store.

Soon the frightened animals were safely aboard, and then, like the deer, the passengers for Golovin were swung overside, to the little tug that had pulled the barge out to the *Mt. McKinley*. My husband and I had come up to Alaska to live with the Eskimos and teach in the school at Koyuk. Our two children, a girl and a boy, were with us and we were all excited about this new experience. In the starlit darkness, we were transferred with our baggage from the tug to a still smaller boat, and Eskimos rowed us to shore. Though it was past ten o'clock by that time, most of the village people were gathered there to greet us. They crowded around to shake hands with us, and everybody was ready to help us with our luggage.

Koyuk, where we were to teach, was farther up Norton Sound, which had begun to freeze. There would be no more boat travel for months, but a plane from Nome picked us up. The weather was cloudy, and the plane flew

so low that we could see fox tracks in the snow beneath us. We followed the coastline until we reached our landing point. Then a channel had to be broken in the ice on the Koyuk River so that a boat could take us to the village of Koyuk. There, too, the people made us welcome. They live in log houses with roofs of earth, and the women and children took me to one of the biggest houses in the village where I got warm and was given good hot coffee to drink.

"*Quee-ah-nah*," said the old lady who gave me the coffee, as I left the house. Later on we learned that this is the way these people said "Thank you" for doing us favors!

Except for the log caches of food and other valuables which are mounted on poles to keep them out of the way of animals, our village of Koyuk looks very much, I think, as old Plymouth must have looked in the days of the Pilgrim colonists in Massachusetts. The log houses extend down the hillside to the beach. The moss-chinked log church stands on a level spot in the center of the village.

School began in the one-room schoolhouse the last part of October and by Christmas we knew all the people in the village quite well. We even knew the Eskimo names of the children, only we always called them by their English names. Before Christmas the older girls were using the school sewing machine every minute of the day. All the humming and busyness meant that each child would have a new drill parka ornamented with the fancy tape designs that only Eskimo girls know how to make. The biggest boys brought our Christmas tree in by dog sled, and every-

Reindeer are so gentle, that youngsters six and seven years old can easily handle a herd of a hundred. They are used as draft animals, and for milk as well

COURTESY U. S. INDIAN SERVICE







one helped to trim it. Soon the people of Koyuk piled a mountain of gifts around it, mostly useful gifts ranging from sacks of flour to mukluks, or skin boots.

Most of our Christmas Eve program was made up of songs, as nearly all of the Koyuk children sing well. One little boy gave his recitation in English and then in Eskimo so that his grandmother could understand him. Everybody wore new white parkas, and when they sang "Silent Night," each one held a lighted candle. The program was in full swing when the young man who was radio operator for Pan American Airways, hurried in with a radiogram that said, "Santa now leaving Nulato, Yukon River. Heading toward Koyuk."

A few minutes after that, Santa arrived, an Eskimo Santa who kept us all laughing with his jokes, for Eskimos are full of fun and love to laugh. From tots to old people, everyone enjoyed the program, the popcorn balls and the gifts Santa passed out. We teachers got wonderful presents—a pair of beautifully made seal and deerskin moccasins, fish, ptarmigan, reindeer meat and delicious frozen native cranberries. The Eskimo preacher had carved a lovely walrus ivory pin for me to match the watch fob he gave my husband.

At five o'clock on Christmas morning we were awakened by the singing of "Joy to the World." A choir of young people stood outside our window in the darkness. All night they had been going from one home to another to sing the Christmas hymns and carols. Soon everybody was up and on the way to the church. The preacher had decorated the rough walls with spruce boughs, and lighted candles shone through the green. It was so cold in the church that we could see our breath on the frosty air, but everybody had on warm parkas, and so we didn't mind. We sang hymns in English and in Eskimo to the music of a tiny organ. Because the older people understood very little English, most of the service was in Eskimo.

For three nights after Christmas, everybody in the village, young and old, assembled in the schoolhouse for games. Two of the older men chose teams, and each team tried to outdo the other. One of the contests was the finger pull. In this, two contestants sit facing one another with their crooked forefingers clasped. Then each one pulls and tugs, trying

to straighten his opponent's finger. In the shoulder-push and neck-pull game, the contestants face each other with sticks held in their mouths which remind one of walrus tusks. They are joined together by cords around their necks. Each one tries to back away on hands and knees and drag his opponent over a line marked on the floor.

On the last night a pilot, a mechanic and an engineer from the Pan American Airways plane which was weather-bound in the village, took part in the games. The three white men beat in games such as jumping from the knees to standing position. At last the Eskimos suspended a bag about five feet from the floor. Each contestant tried to kick the bag with both feet at the same time. That beat the white men and many of the Eskimos, too.

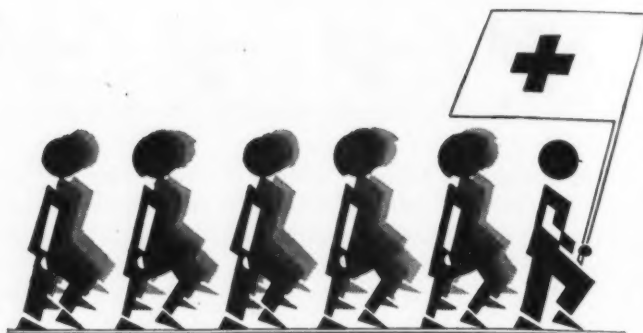
After the games, an Eskimo sang a song to the beating of a sealskin drum, while a young man in white canvas gloves went through the stomps and gestures of a dance to describe a seal hunt.

Christmas week ended with dog races on the ice of the bay during two short winter days. The first day, the day for the girls' races, was calm and sunny. The girl racers brought their dogs, all eager to go, to the starting line and departed at one-minute intervals to race around a small island about a mile away. While the crowd waited for the racers to come back, everybody played Eskimo football. One time an old lady who had to walk with a cane kicked the ball, for Eskimos are never too old or too dignified to enter into games. This old lady lost her balance and sat down hard on the ice, but she just laughed with everybody else and got herself up again in no time.

The next day, the day of the men's races, was cold and windy. The sun showed on the horizon for a few hours, but it was too cold to stay out and play football while the racers were on their sixteen-mile run. One of the men came back with his ears badly frozen in spite of his warm fur parka hood.

All during the dark winter after that, there were games at the schoolhouse on Friday nights, for Eskimos love games and parties. There never were any jollier or more light-hearted people than the villagers of Koyuk, nor people who knew better how to get fun out of life even though their days were full of danger and hardship.


# Ideas on the March



**M**ANY A SOLDIER stationed overseas will be reminded of the American Junior Red Cross on Christmas Day. Because many a Junior Red Cross member has for weeks been working hard at a big job: making hundreds upon hundreds of cards, decorations, tray favors, centerpieces and other gay holiday trimmings which will be used in station hospitals, mess halls, Red Cross clubs—in fact, in all those places around the world where the Red Cross is on the job to serve the armed forces. The jack-in-the-box which you see at the beginning of this paragraph is one of a colorful group of designs used by Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, members. There were poinsettias, angels, snow men, silver stars, lighted lamps, stockings full to brimming over, wreaths and other typical holiday subjects made in pairs, each pair perched atop a toothpick ready to find a place on top of a piece of Christmas ice cream or cake. Five hundred cartons of holiday gifts made by members of the American Junior Red Cross are on their way overseas right now. All these things will carry a “Merry Christmas from the American Junior Red Cross.” All were made so that they could be shipped flat to take up as little precious shipping space as possible. Tucked in each carton is a copy of “The Night before Christmas.” Servicemen love it. The boxes will go along with Christmas supply kits from the senior Red Cross. These kits will include all sorts of things to help Red Cross Field Directors make Christmas for the boys more homelike: sleigh bells, crepe paper, books of Christmas carols and records, paints and construction paper, ribbons and wrappings.

An American prisoner of war is accustomed to receiving a food package each month. The contents are paid for by the Army and Navy as a wartime responsibility of the government,

but the big job of packing and shipping is handled by the American Red Cross. This year there will be an extra Christmas food package and in it there will be lots of special treats. In each package, with a tag, “Gift of the American Junior Red Cross,” will be a puzzle, a game board, or an ocarina. This chance to cheer prisoners of war is one more privilege which is especially yours, through your junior membership in the American Red Cross.

 THIS YEAR as last our armed forces at home are not being forgotten either. In Hawaii, the aim to have a gift from the American Junior Red Cross for every serviceman stationed on the Islands was made a reality by hard work of boys and girls in the schools.

In two Army hospitals on Maui, parties were given during Christmas week with J. R. C. members as hosts. Carols were sung by the girls' choirs of two schools, there was ice cream, and cookies were made by the Junior Red Cross. One school took care of getting sixteen real evergreen trees for wards and recreation rooms.

Little red sleds carrying a pack of cigarettes and matches were included in favors made for Hobbs Army Air Base by San Miguel County, New Mexico, members. Pacific Area members agreed to make all Christmas decorations, tree ornaments and candy for the hospital at Fort Hauchuca, on the Mexican border. In St. Paul, Minnesota, five hundred cards were made for men in Army and Navy hospitals who could not get out to buy cards for their families. Boys and girls in Nacogdoches, Texas, went out into the woods and gathered pine cone and sweet gum balls which they painted in bright holiday colors. Loops for

WAR RELIEF  
PRODUCTION



FIRST AID



NUTRITION



ACCIDENT  
PREVENTION



hanging were made from old screen wire. Eleven cartons were packed full and sent off to hospitals for servicemen and veterans. One hospital wrote that after the holidays every cone was carefully removed from the tree, wrapped separately in paper, and put away for use next year.

Children in country schools of Prince Edward County, Virginia, made boutonnieres of holly tied with red ribbon for hospitalized men at Camp Pickett to wear on their lapels.

Three hundred yards of popcorn were strung by Boston members for Naval Hospital, Chelsea, Massachusetts. Boston members also gave up part of their sugar ration so they could make 130 pounds of candy for men stationed in Harbor Forts.



**BUT OF COURSE** the armed forces don't receive all the attention of J. R. C. members at Christmastime.

In Chattanooga, Tennessee, families of servicemen receiving help from the chapter's Home Service Department were given gifts of clothes, toys and food through the J. R. C. The containers in which the gifts were packed took the form of snowballs, Santa boots, bales of cotton and duffle bags. North Bergen, New Jersey, members reconditioned 250 toys which were especially welcomed by local orphanages now that new toys are so hard to buy.

Minneapolis members sent hundreds of toys, games, dolls, doll furniture, paper dolls, color books, candy, nuts, tray favors and Christmas decorations to the Chapter House for distribution to children's hospitals and settlement houses. Many of the schools sent in their gifts all wrapped, tied and labeled for a boy or girl, and with the age of the child who would enjoy the gift. One hundred and fifty children whose fathers are in the armed forces were also supplied with gifts from the Hennepin County members.



**AS ALWAYS**, of course, boys and girls in South and Central America, Great Britain, Iceland, Greenland, Alaska, and Puerto Rico will receive gift boxes filled by the American Junior Red Cross. To Russia and Great Britain little bags of candy will go, too, with greetings from their J. R. C. friends in the United States. With the ration-



COURTESY CLAUDE A. BROWN, "TIMES-UNION"

**Christmas morning brought joy to the children who received toys made by J. R. C. members in School 29, Rochester, New York**

ing of so many things, these remembrances from American Junior Red Cross members mean more and more, as you can see from this letter received from a teacher in a school in Peterborough, England, where many London school children have been evacuated:

"Last Christmas we had an unexpected and most welcome gift from the American Junior Red Cross. Eight little boxes came our way, and we divided the gifts, wrapping each article in tissue paper. It made just enough for every child to have something, and I cannot express their delight. Such things as hair slides, and so on, have been worn every day since. One boy was the lucky recipient of a bag of marbles. He is a red-headed boy of eleven years called Tom. He seemed to light up and glow like a burning bush. I shall never forget that boy's pleasure.

"We always have a Christmas party for our children, but this year the rationing problem seemed to make the thought of it impossible. We decided to keep up the good old custom though, and our special allowance for a party of thirty children was half a pound of jam and three-quarters of a pound of margarine.

"Our party was mostly bread and meat paste; there was nothing to make cakes with, and no jellies or festive delights. We had a lot of fun, and the little presents from the American Junior Red Cross just made all the difference."

Some time after the holidays, why don't you write us a letter about what Junior Red Cross members in your school did to make others happy at Christmastime?



BICYCLE CORPS



PRODUCTION FOR  
THE ARMED FORCES



GIFT BOXES



VICTORY GARDENS





# Two Christmases a Year

Charlie May Simon

Pictures by Gisella Loeffler

ON THE first Saturday in December, Betty went to visit her friend Anna. They talked about Christmas, twenty whole days away.

"Only I wish Christmas could come more than just once a year," Betty said.

"Do you mean to say you have only one Christmas a year?" Anna's grandmother asked, in surprise.

"Of course, Grandma, there's just one Christmas. That's the twenty-fifth of December," Anna said.

Anna's grandmother was old-fashioned. She wore a long, full skirt and her hair was done up in a knot on top of her head. When she was not in the kitchen cooking good things to eat, she was sitting by the window, embroi-

dering something pretty, or making fine lace. She had come from Czechoslovakia, far over the ocean, to visit her children in this country. Now she could not go back home, for Czechoslovakia had been conquered by the enemy. She had been first in New York and then in Nebraska. Now she had come down to visit her

daughter, who was Anna's mother.

"Marta," she said to her daughter, "do you mean to say that little Anna knows nothing about Saint Nicholas' Day?"

"They don't have that celebration in America, Mama," Anna's mother replied, "and I want my daughter to be like other Americans."

The grandmother said





something which meant "stuff and nonsense" in any language. Then she added in English, speaking very slowly, for the words were hard for her to say, "I doubt if there's a child in any country in the world that wouldn't be glad to have two Christmases a year."

"When is Saint Nicholas' Day?" Betty asked.

"He comes in the night, on the sixth of December, to all good little girls and boys the world over, if they want him to. And then on the twenty-fifth, the birthday of the Christ Child, we give gifts again, to those we love."

Anna and Betty listened as the grandmother told the old story of the good Saint Nicholas. She told how he slipped out in the night and gave bags of gold and other gifts to the poor, so silently that no one knew when he came or went. And every year on his birthday, she said, the children of Czechoslovakia cover their window sills with moss, to receive the gifts.

"But they must be good children," she repeated, "for on that day an angel comes down and fights with the devil, for them. It is their goodness that causes the angel to win."

"Will he come to us if we fix our window for him?" Anna wanted to know.

"I don't see why not," grandmother replied. She put her sewing basket aside. "Come, we will go out in the woods and gather

soft moss for the window sill now."

"But, Mama, we don't have that thick moss growing in the woods here, like you had at home," Anna's mother said.

"We'll find something," the grandmother replied.

She put on a short jacket and threw a shawl over her head. With a basket under her arm, she called for Anna and Betty to come with her. They rode on a streetcar to the end of the line. Then they walked to the woods and searched here and there for moss that grew on the north side of trees and stones.

"It may not be the same kind I knew, but who would want a softer, prettier moss than this?" the grandmother

said, when the basket was full, and they had started on their way home.

When they got to Anna's house, Betty's father was there, talking to Anna's father, while he waited to take her home in his automobile. He had been told about the plans for Saint Nicholas' Day, and he talked as if he knew a secret he would not tell. After supper, he went to his tool chest and took out his jigsaw and



"Who would want a softer, prettier moss than this?" said the grandmother.

hammer and some tiny nails, and his smallest brace and bit. He went out without saying where he was going, and he did not return until long after Betty was asleep.

"Of course you ought to have a holiday tomorrow," the grandmother said the next day when they spread the soft, green moss on the window sill in Anna's room.

"Tomorrow is a school day. The children can't miss their lessons," Anna's mother said.

"I suppose not," the grandmother replied. "But you girls will have to get up early tomorrow so you will have time to enjoy the things the good saint brings you, before it is time to go to school."

Betty was allowed to stay all night with Anna. The two girls talked until their eyes grew heavy with sleep. They wanted to see when the gifts would be placed on the window sill, but, in spite of themselves, they drifted off to sleep.

It was still dark in the room when they awoke the next morning, but they got up and ran to their window without waiting to dress. In the dim light of early dawn, they could see the faint outline of a paper devil on one side of the window, and a paper angel on the other. And on the moss-covered sill were two hearth brooms with gilded handles, and two little wooden chests, painted with the gayest of red and blue flowers. Inside each chest was a dainty handkerchief with lace all around it that the grandmother had made. And there was a tiny bowl of glass made in Czechoslovakia, that caught the red rays of the sun as it rose slowly over the roofs of the houses. Never had the girls seen anything more beautiful than their gifts of the morning.

Now there were signs of footsteps in the house, as the rest of the family got up for the day. Anna's mother suddenly laughed out loud. Anna and Betty, with their gilt-handled hearth brooms and their gayly painted chests still in their hands, ran to the kitchen to see why she laughed so. The grandmother came, too, with a smile on her face.

"Mama," Anna's mother said, still laughing as she turned to the grandmother, "you are still up to your tricks."

"That's what you get for being ashamed of good Saint Nicholas' Day," the old woman said. She pretended to be serious but there was a twinkle in her eyes.

Anna and Betty saw the same soft moss on the sill of the kitchen window, but instead of pretty gifts, there was a bundle of switches and a withered potato and a piece of onion.

"That's what Mama used to tell me St. Nicholas would bring me if I was bad, when I was a little girl," the mother said. "But to show you I'm not so naughty, I have a surprise for all of you. Go put on your clothes, children, and get yourselves ready for breakfast, so you may see the surprise."

When Anna and Betty were dressed and came back into the kitchen, they found Anna's mother dressed in the same clothes she had worn as a bride in the old country, clothes that had been put away in an old trunk and kept there for many years. The skirt was of green wool, long and full, and a black bodice was laced over a white blouse with sleeves that puffed out like dainty balloons. A gay embroidered kerchief was fastened around her neck, and she wore a black apron with fine lace and em-



broidery on it. And her husband wore the same short, gay jacket he had worn then.

The old grandmother blinked back happy tears when she saw them. She knew now that her beloved Czechoslovakia country was not lost, but it still lived, even here in this new land.

"And that's not all," Anna's mother said. "We're having *houska* for breakfast."

She brought a plate of sweet, braided bread, with almonds and raisins in it. This was to be eaten only on Saint Nicholas' Day.

While they were still at breakfast, Betty's father and mother came to join them. And though the grandmother still said it was Saint Nicholas who had brought the gifts because they had been good, Betty and Anna soon learned that their fathers had worked together the night before, making the little wooden chests and the broom handles.

"Oh, I've broken the handle of my hearth broom," Betty said. And then she added, "No. It's not broken after

all. It is hollow inside. And look, there's candy in it!"

Anna opened hers, too, and the girls shook out small pieces of candy onto the table. And, just as at Christmas, everybody ate candy for breakfast.

The hands of the clock turned all too fast, and soon it was time to go to school.

"I suppose you don't have two birthdays a year, either," the grandmother said when the girls put on their coats and were ready to leave.

"Two birthdays!" the girls said.

"Of course there are two birthdays in a year," the grandmother replied. "One is your own, and the other, the one that's even more important, is the birthday of your name saint. Saint Anna for Anna, and Saint Elizabeth for Betty."

"Two birthdays and two Christmases," the girls sang as they started on their way to school.

And they knew there could be no nicer grandmother than one who could bring them two birthdays and two Christmases in one year.



